

## Literature.

## HISTORY OF THE CONSULATE AND THE EMPIRE.

It would be unjust, in criticising an author who had traced the anarchy of the Revolution, to be altogether intolerant of his bias towards a chief whose early youth led the French people, at once to government and to glory, and combined the military tactics of Hannibal with the administrative genius of the First Cæsar. The early administration of Napoleon was probably a greater achievement than his rise to the supreme power. The incidents of the age had conquered the disadvantages of birth, while the power of the army had choked the popular voice; and the devastating career of the Revolution left power nearly as open to preeminent ability as it had been previously opened to hereditary right. It was, in our view, a harder problem to construct a system of government where all prescription had been flung away, and where all moral sanctions had been renounced, than to conquer the armies of the Germanic Empire. Those who remember that the administrative institutions of the First Empire survived it; outlived the Constitutional Monarchy, and aided the restoration of the Imperial form of government, will acknowledge that it failed rather from the abuse of his power than from the defects of its conception.

Yet it is a cardinal inconsistency, arising out of this very bias, that M. Thiers aims to be the national historian of France. He regards the whole triumph of the Empire as the joint glory of Napoleon and of his country. He scarcely recognises the divergence between the interest of France and those of its ruler; and he still more faintly indicates the growth of their dissociation. The fatal result of the personal ambition of Napoleon was, that he who became the greatest oppressor of Europe, became also the worst enemy of France. M. Thiers, therefore, as history proceeds, is reduced to the dilemma of standing in antagonism either to his country or to his hero. This individuality of Napoleon, springing from the dependence of the European system on himself, and rising into bolder prominence when the spirit of the Revolution had expired, invests the history of the Empire with the character of colossal biography.

M. Thiers will not acknowledge the truth, that each of the magnificent designs of Napoleon became successively a signal failure. Yet the idea of the French Empire is not to be compared to one of those gigantic structures which we see looming shadowy through the morning mist, and then dissipated as a baseless phantasm; the power that vanished into a splendid dream might have been on adamantine reality. History knows no stranger sequel to so much of early promise and of amazing effort. The Concordat, which terminated in a simple antagonism between State and Church, might fairly have enabled the Civil Power to govern France through a national religion. The Continental System, which failed at once as an engine of offensive war and as an element of domestic wealth, might have been simply the artificial barrier of French commerce. The foreign alliances of the Empire, which were extorted by victories and were destructive of all permanent support, might have been based upon durable reciprocal interest. The popular enthusiasm, affection, and confidence, of which Napoleon was the object until he had exhausted the very heart of the nation, might have laid the foundation of more liberal institutions, and of a more unselfish compact between the Sovereign and the country. Yet as the eventful drama advances from act to act, each year devours the last, and the catastrophe leaves the scene of so much glory encumbered with its ruins.

For the convenience of the observations we propose to make, it may be observed that the history of this period resolves itself into four principal divisions. The first extends from the institution of the Consulate to the battle of Trafalgar, the peace of Presburg, and the death of Mr. Pitt. The second comprehends the Ministry of Mr. Fox and Lord Grenville, the conquest of Prussia, the establishment of the Continental System, and the peace of Tilsit. The third is marked chiefly by the Peninsular War, the campaign of Wagram and the Divorce. And the fourth by the Russian, German, and French campaigns of 1812, 1813, and 1814.

We shall follow the author into each of these divisions; and in dealing with the first period, we shall confine ourselves to the political and the maritime events involved in the relations of France and England.

No clearer characteristic can be instanced of M. Thiers' erroneous conception of our foreign policy, than that he represents money as the spring of all our public resolutions. The question whether a policy of greater conciliation upon our part might originally have averted the French declaration of war against this country in 1793, is one on which we shall never probably be unanimous. But it will be generally acknowledged that the war was pursued by England for a great principle of morality and of justice. M. Thiers, on the other hand, ventures to assert that we made our national wealth our standard of right. The charge calls for no elaborate investigation; for M. Thiers meets his own theory with a precise and circumstantial refutation.

On this subject he advances four distinct propositions which with singular perspicuity eliminate each other. The first asserts that the Continental Powers in 1800 were maintaining a resolute contest against the French Republic. England, for whom war was nothing but a question of finance, had solved this question for herself in instituting the income tax, which already yielded an abundant revenue. She therefore desired to prolong hostilities. This is proposition he first. M. Thiers elsewhere corroborates this mercenary view of our political principles, by contrasting our belligerent policy in 1800 with the opposite policy which we pursued in an opposite financial condition, during the Lille negotiations of 1797. 'England, indeed,' (writes the author) 'had desired to treat, and to send Lord Malmesbury to Lille in 1797, because her finances were embarrassed.' This is proposition the second. According to these two statements, then, our prosperity dictated the rejection of peace in 1800, and our poverty rendered sincere our negotiation in 1797.

The second volume contains M. Thiers' annihilation of his own hypothesis. We are there told that the charges on the British Treasury for the year 1800, notwithstanding the income tax exceeded its revenue by 650 million francs, that its total expenditure rose to 1,723 millions, 'a sum enormous at any time, but especially in 1800.' When, therefore, the author's desired of depicting us as an impoverished and insolvent nation preponderates over that of describing us as a mercenary belligerent Power, we are led to infer that our war-policy was maintained in spite of the severest financial burdens. Proposition the third thus destroys proposition the first. In the same volume, again, we are told, in reference to the acceptance of peace by Buonaparte, in 1801, 'that the remembrance of the negotiation of Lord Malmesbury, in 1797, which had been but an empty demonstration on the part of Mr. Pitt, had left on the mind of the First Consul an irritating impression. When, therefore, the author's desire reproaching our insincerity preponderates in turn over that of denouncing our rancour, we are told that the negotiation which fiscal difficulties had dictated in 1797, was simply fictitious and illusive! Proposition the fourth thus destroys proposition the second.

Take next an instance of misconception in regard both to our policy and our public men. Mr. Thiers' view of our rejection of the overtures of Buonaparte in 1800, illustrates both these points. He first refers their rejection to the fact that war coincided with the passions and interest of M. Pitt, who had made war with France the basis of his political existence; and who, if peace had been restored, would perhaps have been compelled to retire. He next criticises the discourtesy of the British Government in communicating, by a note from Lord Grenville to Talleyrand, their answer to the overture which Buonaparte had addressed directly to George III.

It is superfluous to refute the former charge against Pitt. We believe that no Minister who has governed England during the last hundred years was ever guilty of making or prolonging war upon any other than national and moral grounds. But a more distorted portraiture was probably never drawn. Pitt had been Minister during nearly ten years of peace, previous to the French declaration of war against this country, in 1793. No one had been more anxious for the success of the Lille negotiation in 1796, which is

first termed by M. Thiers a fiscal necessity and then a diplomatic sham than Pitt himself. If M. Thiers had read Lord Malmesbury's Diaries, he would have known that, had the points at issue in that negotiation been narrowed to the cession of the Cape or Ceylon, Pitt was ready to have yielded upon either of these questions, in defiance of the opposition of Lord Grenville, who would have quitted the Cabinet. He next, as we have seen, rest the invincible hostility of Pitt towards the French Government on the ministerial answer returned to the overtures of the First Consul. He here shows an ignorance of the plainest principles of the British Constitution. He is not apparently aware that a direct answer from the king of Great Britain to the head of the French Executive would have been no more binding on the British Government, than a judicial opinion of the King upon a lawsuit in Westminster Hall would have bound his Court of Chancery or his Court of King's Bench.

We have taken an instance or two of M. Thiers self-contradiction, and an instance or two of his misconceptions; we will take next an instance of his deliberate injustice. Mr. Pitt, (he writes), 'by his brutal manner of replying to the French overtures, drew upon himself just and well founded attacks.' He publishes *in extenso* both the original overture and rejoinder of the French Government, but he withholds the intervening reply of Lord Grenville. He publishes *in extenso* the speeches of Fox, Sheridan, and Tierney, on the question of peace; and he omits the answer of Pitt, which forms the vindication of the obnoxious despatch. It is possible that he may have found in the *Moniteur*, his cloudy pillar and his guardian fire, neither Mr. Pitt's speech nor Lord Grenville's note. An official journal of the day is certainly not likely to be more dispassionate than a historian in the next half century. But the inference remains that M. Thiers has reprobated what he has not read on the authority of a journal notorious for its official falsehood.

Credulity is not less a prominent characteristic of M. Thiers than his inconsistency, his misconception, and his partisanship. He describes with almost a vindictive satisfaction a 'bouleversement social' by the English populace, whom he asserts to have pillaged the fair dwellings of the aristocracy in the country, in consequence of the suffering to which they were reduced by the rejection of peace. Here he sees the just retribution of England. It happens that this is the romantic exaggeration of a distress chiefly originating in a failure of domestic crops, and following too closely our refusal to negotiate so have been appreciably lessened by a pacification founded on the French overture. It is strange that a writer naturally so acute as M. Thiers does not perceive the practical difficulty of negotiating with Buonaparte early in 1800. He had but just usurped power with antecedents which, as far as they were known, did not raise him in the eyes of foreign countries much above the notorious profligacy of the French directors. The success of his usurpation was then improbable. The recognition of his acts by a succeeding government was still more so. In the happy antithesis of Seneca, 'Antonius hostis a republica iudicatus, nunc hostem rempublicam iudicat.' It required at that moment more than ordinary sagacity to discover that the Revolution, which had till then devoured all her children had at last found a responsible chief and a master.

Turn now to his picture of the continental alliance arrayed against us. It is but a fair instance of the resolute obliquity of his historic vision, that every maritime confederacy formed against this country, and over which this country triumphed, is made a reproach against us, while every territorial confederacy which France encountered and defeated, adds a chaplet to her glory. In the latter instance the author looks clearly forward to the issue; in the former he carefully bounds his vision to the formation of the confederation itself. Marengo and Copenhagen illustrate this inconsistency. Mr. Pitt (writes M. Thiers), 'in not having been willing to treat before Marengo, and General Buonaparte in having disarmed one part of Europe by his victories, and turned the other against England by his policy, were both incontestably the authors of this prodigious change of fortune.' The author's contrast adroitly closes immediately before the battles of Copenhagen and Alexandria.

The misconception of M. Thiers upon this head are nearly innumerable. Take, for instance, the grounds of Pitt's resignation in 1801. On this question, he asserts that he has authentic information. 'Mr. Pitt,' he says, 'foresook neither the peace nor its disruption.' Canning tells us, on the contrary, that Pitt acknowledged to him in 1802, 'that had he remained in power, he felt it would have been necessary to recur to a pacific negotiation.' Again, he perpetually describes Pitt's conduct when out of office as an intrigue for the resumption of power; whereas the authentic records of his life, which we had occasion to examine minutely in our last Number, prove that his conduct was regulated by wholly different motives. He revives the exploded story that our Government had supported the designs of the French refugees, which it is now unnecessary to refute, although we have lived to see this very question of refugees, resume some of the adventitious importance it acquired shortly before the rupture of the peace of Amiens. He even countenances the ridiculous statement that the British general, Stuart had attempted to assassinate the French general, Sebastiani. He reproduces the calumny of the *Moniteur*, that the conspiracy against the life of Paul originated with this Court. If he had read Lord Malmesbury's Journals, he would no doubt have reproduced also with infinite satisfaction the idle story, that three Scotch doctors were in at the imperial death, and dissected the murdered Czar.

Le Ministere Addington, says M. Thiers 'payait encore George Cadoudal dont la persévérance à conspirer était connue; il mettait sa disposition des sommes considérables pour l'entretien des sicaires dont la troupe courait sans cesse de Portsmouth à Jersey sur la côte de Bretagne.'

These are M. Thiers' views of our Government and our character,—these the Rafaellesque portraits which are to rival the best 'Virgins' of imaginative literature! Let us see if his portraits of the naval and military actions of the same period are more faithful. Take the battle of Copenhagen in 1801. M. Thiers is here not alone grossly inaccurate in his statements, but even inconsistent in his inaccuracy. He describes this battle as a victory snatched from an impending defeat, such as he has himself described the battles of Arcola and Marengo to; and he attempts to discredit the British navy for that very change of threatened disaster into ultimate success for which he has justly praised the French commander. Let us compare his statement with the despatches of Lord Nelson, and even with the history of Jomini.

It is clear that M. Thiers has blindly copied the official fabrication of Commodore Fischer, the Danish Commander-in-Chief,—a coward who fled from the action in such haste that he forgot to strike his broad-pennant as he left his ship, and whom Lord Nelson, on her surrender, consequently claimed as a prisoner of war on shore. In that fabrication, which is to be found in the Nelson Despatches, it is asserted that 'Nelson, had twelve ships of the line and several frigates.' M. Thiers repeats the same statement, adding that they were all in action by ten o'clock. 'We had,' answered Nelson, in his reply to General Lindholm, 'only five seventy-fours, two sixty-fours, two fifties, and one frigate engaged. Two seventy-fours, and one sixty-four by an accident grounded on the Crown Island.' So much for the accuracy of the original computation of force.

M. Thiers thus describes the issue:— 'Nelson, nearly vanquished, was not dismayed, and resolved to send a flag of truce to the Prince of Denmark, who took part in the horrible scene as one of the batteries. The Prince, wavering under this frightful spectacle, fearing for the city of Copenhagen, now deprived of the succour of the floating batteries, ordered a suspension of fire. This was an error: for a few instants more, and Nelson's fleet, almost put hors-de-combat, would have been obliged to retreat half destroyed.' (Vol. ii. p. 416.)

Again:— 'But the English fleet had been terribly maltreated; and, but for the great haste of the Prince Royal of Denmark to listen to Nelson's flag of truce, it would probably have succumbed. The victory, then, had been almost a defeat and moreover, the result arrived at was not considerable.' (Vol. ii. p. 440.)

(To be Continued.)