

NAPOLEON: THE LAST PHASE

pestilent instrument which it was equally dangerous to utilise or to neglect. Napoleon did both, a course which combined both disadvantages. Talleyrand, cynical and ignoble as he was in many respects, stands on a higher level, and may find some excuse, not merely in the laxity and exigencies of a revolutionary epoch but in a cool foresight which gives colour to the plea that, while doing his best for himself, he was doing the best for France. That question does not concern us. But, in spite of indolence, and in spite of corruption, he was a consummate Foreign Minister and an unrivalled diplomatist. Up to the time of the Spanish imbroglio he was Napoleon's close confidant, as he had been one of the earliest associates of his fortunes. Napoleon charged him with advising the policy with regard to Spain and then denouncing it. Talleyrand denied the charge. We are inclined to think that both were right. Talleyrand, as we learn from his intimate friend, Madame de Rémusat openly declared, and had no doubt advised the Emperor, that "a Bourbon was an inconvenient neighbour to Napoleon, and it was doubtful whether such a neighbour could be tolerated. But he entirely disapproved of Napoleon's proceedings. In a word, he probably gave the impulsion and inspired the idea, while Napoleon found the methods. Possibly something of the same kind occurred with regard to the Enghien affair. The fact, however, that we have to deal with is the rupture, not its cause. For we are persuaded that, had Napoleon been able to retain and work with Talleyrand, his fall would not have taken place. He quarrelled with both Talleyrand and Fouché and was never able to replace them.

His relations to both these officials throws an instructive light on the cynical side of his character. He grossly and publicly insulted Talleyrand on more than