

MANUEL.

TRANSLATED FROM TIMON'S "LIVRE DES ORATEURS."

BY W. P. C.

THE French empire revolved around Napoleon as the circumference around its axis. He alone directed its armies upon the field of battle. He alone within his closet had the making and the breaking of leagues and treaties. He alone issued instructions to the provincial governors. He was the only public political commentator. He alone spoke through his commissioners in the mute assemblies of the Legislature and the Senate. So that it may be said there was not in the whole empire a general, a diplomatist, a governor, a statesman or an orator, except Napoleon.

Thus it happened that when the *Tribune* regained its liberty, and the obstacles to eloquence were removed, the parliamentary orators came forward irresolutely, and like men unused to debate. In their actions they were constrained, and when they strove to speak, their utterance was feeble and indistinct.

Manuel appeared.

Manuel had a tall person, a pale and melancholy countenance, an accent provincial yet sonorous, and an extreme simplicity of manners.

He untied rather than cut the most Gordian difficulties. He moved with a matchless dexterity around every proposition. He examined it, he felt of it, he probed it in every part, in its loins and in its entrails, that he might discover whatever it contained; and of all this he rendered to the Assembly an account in which nothing was omitted and nothing exaggerated. He did not break out in cries and furious gestures like those apoplectic rhetoricians who sweat and pant beneath their pretences, and who are constantly exciting apprehension lest their lungs may be disorged, and they belch forth blood at every word. He was a man of elevated judgment, honest and undissimulating, always master of himself, brilliant and easy in his language, skilled in the art of unfolding, continuing, and concluding his subject. Such qualities as these gained for him the good opinions of the Chamber of Representatives.

We need not suppose that when political tempests lour, a very vehement orator is always the one to obtain a great ascendancy over the assembly he addresses; for generally, he urges the adoption of the most strenuous measures, and

if he pleases energetic characters, he equally terrifies the timid, who are on all occasions the most numerous. When these latter fancy they observe in the gloom swords drawn above their heads, snares spread beneath their feet, dark treachery ready to enshroud them, they turn towards the candid speaker in whom they may repose confidence and belief. When they tremble through fear, they love to obtain safety in the protection of unwavering and tranquil spirits. When their judgment proves at fault on difficult questions, they love to hear them satisfactorily explained by another. This did Manuel do.

When he observed, after the abdication of Napoleon, that the executive authority was still undecided for whom it should declare itself; that civil war threatened to break out during the foreign; that the Chamber of Representatives was itself divided, and that, hurried on by contrary winds, every man steered his course at random, some favoring the Bourbons, others the Republic, some the Duke of Orleans, and others still inclined towards the son of the Emperor—Manuel invoked the good will of the soldiery, the preservation of the country, and the nature of the constitution itself, in behalf of Napoleon II.

With enthusiasm did the assembly greet this proposal; they felt themselves indebted to him who had freed them from an embarrassing perplexity, and restored that unity that is, in times of crisis, above all things indispensable to a legislative body.

Manuel was appointed to draw up a constitution—a dangerous commission, an office of trust, a political testament, which, in the name of the moribund Chamber, he committed to writing for the benefit of posterity. Nobly did he persevere in its discussion amidst the balls and missiles that were whizzing in his ear. He summoned the citizens to arms, even when all was lost, and the Prussian artillery already thundered on the bridge of Jena. Manuel, calm and intrepid, recited from the rostrum these words of Mirabeau:

"We will not depart hence except at the point of the bayonet."

Manuel was the most considerable, nay, almost the *only* orator of the Chamber of Representatives.