



TALLEYRAND

Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord
1754–1838

A COLLECTION OF BOOKS, PRINTS,
AUTOGRAPHS, DRAWINGS & MANUSCRIPTS
SPANNING A LIFE IN DIPLOMACY



CONTENTS

Introduction

Ancestors

Family

A Career in the Church

Deputy at the National Assembly

Mission to London 1792

Refugee in America (April 1794–June 1796)

Foreign Minister to the Directory

Foreign Minister to the Consulate

In the service of the Emperor

Representative of France at the Congress of Vienna

President of the Council of Ministers (9 July 1815)

Grand Chamberlain to the Bourbon monarchy
as 'Prince de Talleyrand' (24 September 1815)

In the service of the July Monarchy

The Creation of modern Belgium

The Memoirs

Talleyrand in literature and history

Biography

Source references

Index

Front cover: lithograph after a drawing by Carl Vogel in London, June 1834 (cat.no. 154)

Back cover: arms from engraved Valençay bookplate (cat.no.43a)

Back flap: Talleyrand as a turncoat in April 1815, caricature attributed to Delacroix (cat.no. 107)

TALLEYRAND AN INTRODUCTION

Of all those who lived through the tumultuous events that began with the fall of the Bastille and ended at the 1830 revolution, no one was more intimately involved than Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord (1754–1838). Many accidents helped to shape his destiny. First, there was his club foot, which in his parents' view disqualified him from inheriting his father's many titles. Instead, he was destined for the church, for which nothing, in temperament or inclination, fitted him. He took orders, under the aegis of his uncle Alexandre, Archbishop of Rheims (16). Within the Church, however, his natural abilities found an outlet in 1780 when he was appointed Agent-General of the Clergy. This could have been a sinecure, but Talleyrand saw it as an opening into the wider field of affairs. He suggested that as the Church was rich and the state virtually bankrupt, the Church should buy from the Government the right of raising lotteries and then abolish them. Nothing came of this, but it brought him in touch with Calonne, then minister of finance. Calonne's policy of free trade was typified by the commercial treaty with Britain in 1786, and underlay the new interest that Talleyrand took in economics. In 1788, on the eve of the Revolution, family interest made him Bishop of Autun.

As the representative of his diocese, Talleyrand took part in the meeting of the States-General in 1789, and joined the Third Estate, now called National Assembly. His friend

Mirabeau found an ally in him (25, 35), and he was quick to press for reform both of state finance and education. He outraged his clerical colleagues by urging the nationalisation of church property (36, Sieyès' copy), which he saw as the only way to adjust the imbalance between church and state, but he also pressed for the abolition of the lottery, the emancipation of the Jews, and proposed an Anglo-French conference for stabilising weights and measures. In 1790 he was elected President of the Assembly, but the drift of events were separating him more from the Church, while he viewed with anxiety the new aggressive drift to war between France and Austria, only just forestalled with Britain. A mission thither with his friend and fellow-roué, the duc de Lauzun, was not recognised by the government (40), but returning he soon found that Paris was no longer a safe place for him. Danton gave him a passport, and he escaped to London just in time.

He had little to do there but count his assets. First, there was his long aristocratic descent; as a child he had visited his great-grandmother, the Princesse de Chalais, wife of the grandson of that Comte de Chalais who was executed for conspiring against Louis XIII in 1627 (1–2). Later, in 1808, at the height of his fame, he had his lineage set out and printed in *Lettres à Cléo* (3). Secondly, he could point to a remarkable series of published political papers, advocating a series of measures and policies, some ahead of their time, but all

consistent in themselves, many of which came to pass later. They included his attack on state lotteries (19), his plans for a loan to redeem the national debt (20) and the nationalisation of church assets, and, most remarkable of all, his defence of Turgot's discount banking system against Necker (24), with its prophecy of the disastrous effect of *assignats* on the value of money (32), and the need for a decimal coinage (28). Add to this his proposal of a unified system of weights and measures, duly accepted in 1790 (34 – who was the annotator of this fascinating copy?), and the immense *Rapport sur l'Instruction Publique* 1791, which brought into being the Institut de France and laid the foundations of the French educational system (36, probably given to Talleyrand's closest English friend, Alexander Baring), and the major and most constructive part of the political achievements of the Revolution is there, clearly Talleyrand's work. Third and last of the assets was a portion of his already extensive library, which he was obliged to sell in 1793 (42).

Like Oscar Wilde, he had only his genius to declare, when in January 1794 he was evicted from Britain under the new Aliens Act, and took ship for Philadelphia. He had one letter of introduction, from Lord Shelburne to Washington. This got a civil reply, but no more, and, not for the first time, Talleyrand, was thrown back on his wits to stay alive. A vivid picture of his Philadelphia days is in Kipling's 'A Priest in Spite of Himself'. This was the Talleyrand who frequented Moreau de Saint-Méry's bookshop at 84 First Street, where he probably got his copy of *Constitutions des Treize Etats-Unis de l'Amerique* 1783, printed at Paris for Franklin and sold in

Philadelphia (43a). He met Alexander Hamilton, who became a firm friend. Always ready to gamble (as Hamilton did not), on the bourse as at the card table, he made a fortune speculating on the timber forests of western Massachusetts, and later used his experience to point to the economic advantages enjoyed by both Britain and America through the peace then obtaining in a lecture to the Institut (44–6). By this time he had petitioned the National Convention from Philadelphia (43b), Madame de Staël had his proscription lifted, and he returned to join the Directoire, becoming Foreign Minister in 1797. As such, his activities are reflected in his correspondence here (47–55), including his secret negotiations with the United States, of which he was obliged to print a defence (53, a presentation copy). The coup d'état that brought about the Consulate made no change to him, and his ministerial correspondence continued without a break. He was able to ensure that the proscription of his old friend the Comte de Narbonne was lifted (57). He was unable to bring about peace with Britain (59), but took an active part in the drafting of the Treaty of Amiens (62), although he thought it a forlorn hope (64–5). Hauterive's *De l'Etat de la France* 1800 (60), partially drafted by Talleyrand, presented a forceful picture of France's military strength.

Napoleon was now free to turn east and overrun Austria and most of Germany. An increasingly reluctant Talleyrand was forced to follow, negotiating settlement after settlement, but no longer able to restrain the emperor after Austerlitz and the Treaty of Pressburg (70a). A European peace, with France contained within her national borders, that he had advocated

since before the Revolution, was more and more elusive. If British cartoonists (66, 69, 71–5) were aware of his views, so must Napoleon have been, but he chose to ignore the advice he was given. With the Treaty of Tilsit (78), Talleyrand was relieved of his ministerial chores and promoted to be Grand Chamberlain and Vice Grand Elector, as such only inferior to the three consuls. He was thus the last authority to authorise court expenditure (76–7, 79–80). His own new magnificence was well captured by Gerard (83–91). The British cartoonists, as usual, saw affairs with brutal accuracy (81–2, 92, 95). He remained in close touch with his oldest financial friends, and was careful, not for the first time, to see that his Amsterdam banker, Pierre-César La Bouchère, brother-in-law of Alexander Baring, was kept in close touch with the march of events (96).

Prudently, Talleyrand kept in the background during Napoleon's last campaign, only emerging during the vacuum when he and his family left Paris. He remained, and it was with him that the victorious allies came to discuss a regency. As Vice Grand Elector he was the senior officer of the empire, and it was he who chose the four representatives of the former Senate as a provisional government (Chateaubriand's 'table at whist'). He drew up the terms on which the Bourbons could return. He who had been the butt of English caricaturists (97, 99) now became that of disappointed Bonapartists (98). The Treaty of Paris that followed, which allowed France to keep all the territory held in 1792 and spared her indemnities, was indeed Talleyrand's master-piece of negotiation (100). Once again minister for foreign affairs, he was France's chief

representative at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. 'Le Congrès ne marche pas, mais il danse', the Prince de Ligne's aphorism (106), was seized on by the caricaturists (103), not least of whom was Delacroix, an irony no doubt appreciated by the man who was probably his father (107). The return of Napoleon hurried the Congress to a conclusion, and the centre of action shifted to Belgium, followed by 'Mr Tout-à-tous' (108), as Talleyrand had become. He had now to be accepted, reluctantly, by the returning Louis XVIII, as head of the government and, as always, minister of foreign affairs. He, to whom Wilberforce had addressed his plea for the abolition of slavery in French dominions (104), saw it embodied in the terms of the treaty (110). Finally, Talleyrand ensured that his greatest achievement should be memorialised in a suitably monumental painting by Eugène Isabey, engraved by Jean Godefroy, and amplified by the still new process of lithography by Godefroy Engelmann (111).

The gratitude of the Bourbons did not last, and the hatred of the 'ultras' made his continued presence impossible. On 19 September 1815 he resigned, refusing to accede to the final terms of the Treaty of Paris, which he knew would be unpopular. He was succeeded by the duc de Richelieu, like himself a moderate. Out of office, he was treated with great respect. He was appointed Grand Chamberlain, an honorary post that gave him an official presence at court, and with it a pension of 100,000 francs. This was as well, as his new position involved further responsibility for court expenditure (119,121). Furthermore, Simons, his Belgian bankers, had failed, and he was for a second time obliged to sell books, this time the

better and older books that he had retained in 1793 (117). Seeing the high prices paid in London since the Roxburghe sale in 1812, he wisely consigned it to Sotheby's through Baring and La Bouchère, who made over 200,000 francs from its sale. The trust that he placed in his English friends is very clearly revealed in the letter written to La Bouchère (123). That he was not forgotten outside France was made clear by the award of the Duchy of Dino by Ferdinand I, King of the Two Sicilies (118), with remainder to his nephew Edmond, on whose death it passed to his wife, who as duchesse de Dino became all in all to Talleyrand in the years that followed.

Louis XVIII died in 1824, and as Charles X drifted further towards absolutism, Talleyrand intervened, supporting the revolutionary *National*, edited by his new protégé Thiers. Watching from his house in the rue St-Florentin, he approved the revolution of July 1830 that brought Louis-Philippe d'Orléans to the throne. Grandville's caricature shows that he was widely known to be responsible for the change (131). It was crucial, if the new monarchy were to gain acceptance, to gain the support of Britain. So the old man, now 77, was sent off on his last diplomatic mission, as ambassador in London. Here he renewed his friendship with Baring, soon to be made Lord Ashburton, and La Bouchère (128), and again attracted the attention of the London caricaturists (129). He was plunged into negotiation with the Duke of Wellington, now prime minister, and representatives of the other European powers about the 'Belgian question'. Despite his long acquaintance with Queen Hortense of Holland, Talleyrand

was in favour of the separation of Belgium, and it was his choice of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, uncle by marriage of Queen Victoria, as king of the new country, that was approved by the other commissioners at the London conference (130). This time it was the British caricaturists who gave credit where it was due (132–3). The Dutch were less amused (134–5).

Talleyrand's always distinctive figure became more and more a gift to caricaturists. Count d'Orsay and John Doyle in London, Grandville, Benjamin and Traviès in *La Caricature* in Paris, give an almost month by month account of Talleyrand and his embassy (136–152). Carl Vogel came from Dresden to make the famous portrait of Talleyrand in old age (154–7). Ary Scheffer painted an even more imposing portrait of the ambassador for his old friend, Lord Holland (159). He was always at home at Holland House, and it was there that Talleyrand inscribed the copy of Le Roy's *Lettres Philosophiques sur l'intelligence et la perfectibilité des animaux, avec quelques lettres sur l'homme* (158). His last achievement was the signing in April 1834 of the Quadruple Alliance between France, Britain, Spain and Portugal, brilliantly caricatured by Benjamin (151). His last years were spent shuttling between his own house at Valençay and the Duchesse de Dino's at Rochecotte in the Touraine (166–168), where his old English friends were always to be welcomed (169). His last public act was to pronounce the *éloge* for another old friend, the Comte Reinhart, his fellow-Academician (170–171); he gave a copy of the text to the Scottish wife of his son, the Comte de Flahaut, who was also given Mignet's 1839 *éloge* of Talleyrand himself (174).

With his death, Talleyrand entered into the pantheon of those who reach mythological fame in their own lifetime. He attained this in 1789, when his old friend Mirabeau gave him a part in *La Galerie des Etats-Généraux*, translated into English next year (180); he also figured in Rivarol's *Petit Dictionnaire des Grands Hommes de la Révolution* (181). Many imaginary 'memoirs' followed, up to and after Waterloo, when his equivocal position was satirised in *Dictionnaire des Girouettes* (187). Madame de Staël's memoirs, published after her death in 1817, were more reliable, and eagerly acquired by her English acquaintance, including the Duke of Bedford (188). A host of other memoirists, including Chateaubriand and Samuel Rogers (201–202), added to the myth history of Talleyrand and his time. The historians of press-control and caricature, Welschinger and Champfleury, found a place for him (205–6). Biographies proper date back to 1797 (221), and both Brougham and Henry Lytton Bulwer contributed their accounts (230–231). They continue to this day (256–257), but the old man, artfully postponing publication of his *Mémoires*, entrusting them to the duchesse de Dino, until 1891–2, contrived to have the last word on all his contemporaries (176–178).

The collection comprised in this catalogue is probably the most complete that has been or can ever be made on Talleyrand, his life and times. All his major works that appeared in printed form are here, including the original terms of the treaties that were his principal achievement, liberally spiced with his own autograph letters and other original documents. No other period besides the French

Revolution and First Empire has generated so much interest, evinced in the memoirs of the participants and contemporary and later historians. All the major editions are here. Talleyrand attracted gossip and scandal throughout his life, and the growth of the legends that grew up round him can be charted in contemporary scandal-sheets, malicious attacks made on his character and policies and occasional appreciations of his real merits. Viewed as too clever by half, both by the old regime he was forced to abandon and by the new Bonapartists, he outlived them both, to see the house of Orleans take on the task of maintaining France great and at peace. This was a task from which he had never deviated, whatever his enemies might say about his personal loyalties. The contents of this catalogue are a monument to this, as well as all the many other achievements of his long life.

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