AN AUSTRIAN DIPLOMATIST IN THE FIFTIES.

IT would naturally be expected of me that, in response to the invitation to lecture before this learned University, I should say something concerning events in which I have myself taken part during the many years of my life that have been spent abroad. Officers of the army and navy and Indian civilians on their retirement find their tongues untied. It is not so with Foreign Office agents. They are inhibited from publicly discussing the countries where they have served or narrating their own experiences, unless they have obtained the previous approval of the Secretary of State. This is a salutary rule, and one which I trust

always to observe. Accordingly, I must, if I wish to speak of international affairs, go back to a period earlier than my own entrance into public life, and betake myself to a country where I have never served.

I have therefore chosen for my subject transactions which, for the most part, took place more than fifty years ago, in a capital with which I have had no official connexion.

In recent years the public has derived no small amount of entertainment, and the student of contemporary history much interesting information, from the publication of the memoirs of distinguished personages. Prince Bismarck's *Reflections and Reminiscences*, in which he claimed the credit of having so edited a comparatively harmless telegram as to bring about the war of 1870, form a marked example, and not long ago the hasty manner in which the memoirs of Prince Hohenlohe were launched forth, created wrathful excitement and even consternation in high places. It will be re-

membered what annoyance was caused some years earlier by the publication of La Marmora's *Un po' più di luce*, in which the genesis of the Prusso-Italian alliance of 1866 was exposed to the light of day. Minor instances of regrettable indiscretion have been plentiful, and I need not specify them. Old age loves to indulge itself in recalling the past, and the favourite amusement of the retired statesman is to write his reminiscences. As a rule he would do better not to publish them. If, in the interests of historical knowledge, it is desirable that the inner secrets of diplomacy should be unveiled, prudence would suggest a measure of delay, at least until the political events related have become so completely a portion of the past that no harm can result from the facts being disclosed. The death of the author is not sufficient justification for his posthumous tongue being immediately unloosed. It is difficult to excuse the publication of Guizot's memoirs, or of the correspondence of Palmerston, which relate the

part they respectively played in the Spanish Marriages, when but a short time had elapsed since the accomplishment of that disastrous intrigue. A couple of centuries would perhaps not be too long a time to withhold the political papers of a Frederick the Great, while the diaries of a Busch and the piquant letters of a Sir Robert Morier to his Constantinople colleague might be kept back for no more than fifty. In England we are perhaps somewhat too indifferent to the revelation of political secrets. Sometimes more is communicated to Parliament and the public than is necessary, though Parliamentary papers often present gaps in the correspondence, and the more important documents seldom see the light. Nothing is to be gained by taking the world prematurely into the confidence of governments in regard to matters of high policy.

From the censure that, from this point of view, must be passed on most contemporary political memoirs, those of Hübner must be

exempted. His first book, in which he related his share in the events of 1848–9, saw the light in 1891, and the more extensive journals of his ten years' residence in Paris as Austrian representative were published only in 1904, after his death, when most of his contemporaries had passed away. No fault can be found with him for setting down anything in malice, or any fact or opinion which could redound to the discredit of the government which he served with such skill, insight and devoted loyalty. It is true that he criticises freely the character and conduct of Napoleon III and his ministers. The dynasty of the Bonapartes has long passed away, and to judge from present signs there is no likelihood of its restoration. But he utters nothing injurious to the character of the French nation, nor anything calculated to diminish our admiration for a people inspired by an ardent love of liberty, by patriotism and the constant pursuit of the ideal in politics.

Since Sir Henry Wotton perpetrated for the

amusement of his Augsburg friend the well-known witticism which is popularly believed to describe the conduct characteristic of international agents, the general view has been that the weapons of the diplomatist are concealment, artifice, evasion, and systematic falsehood. It is curious to see what has been said of the diplomatic calling by those who do not belong to it. In M. Ollivier's *Empire Libérale* some very unfriendly opinions are quoted. Guizot, he says, complains that diplomacy abounds in proceedings and talk of no value, which can be neither ignored nor believed. Tocqueville is severe on the poor literary style of diplomatic correspondence. Cavour finds that diplomatists complicate questions instead of discovering their solution. Bismarck, writing to his wife, denounces the diplomacy pursued at Frankfort for its emptiness and charlatanism. M. Ollivier himself is even more severe. "I have been struck," he says, "with the constant uncertainty of the information given in the numerous

French, as well as foreign, diplomatic despatches I have read." He asserts that "in spite of their theory that in public business what is said differs from what the speaker really thinks, even professional diplomatists end by letting themselves be taken in like any ordinary simpleton by the conventional tricks which they practise on each other, and while fancying themselves clever, often fall into traps." He expresses his surprise at finding how incapable they are of forming an accurate judgment. Nearly all of them are what Napoleon used to call *ambassadeurs à conversations*, who make it their business to repeat in detail their conversations with ministers and sovereigns, but avoid compromising themselves by giving a decided opinion on what is said on such occasions. They beat about the bush, they tack hither and thither, envelope themselves in a cloud of empty phrases, or still worse, they adopt the expedient of expressing one view in one part, and an opposite one in another part of a despatch.

They are entirely engrossed by the particular question that has been entrusted to them, neglecting to take into account its proper place in the general scheme of policy: they magnify its importance, at the risk of hindering or compromising the more important action of their government in some other quarter. They allow themselves to convert business discussions into personal matters, are sensitive to small slights, somebody has not bowed low enough to them, they have been kept waiting for a decoration they expected, their wives have not been treated with due respect; they occupy their minds less with their negotiations than with the satisfaction of their spite, or rather they regard its satisfaction as the success of their negotiation. He finds among the diplomatists of the Second Empire "busy-bodies on the look-out for sensational news, scatter-brains who perceived nothing of the events passing around them and heard nothing of the conversations which took place in their presence,

self-important asses, presumptuous persons who imagine themselves to have predicted everything that happened, trying to demonstrate all this in their dull correspondence, egotists whose only care was to render themselves *persona grata* to the government to which they were accredited, forgetting that the triumph of a really patriotic diplomatist consists the rather in being disliked by those whose schemes he has to watch, expose and thwart."

This, if well-founded, is a serious indictment, and would go far to justify those who have proposed to abolish the diplomatic profession altogether. It is fair, however, to listen to the other side. The first requisite of the historian, it has been acutely said, is kindliness, and if it is too much to ask from a critic that he should treat his victim as if he loved him, it is certain that no judgment can be sound that is not informed by sympathy. From an eloquent lawyer and leader of advanced radicals what amount of this could be expected for a calling

that is naturally of a conservative temper, and whose motto should be *il viso sciolto ed i pensieri stretti.*

Let Hübner speak for his cloth. He exclaims: "What a trying profession is that of the diplomatist. I know of none which demands so much self-denial, so much readiness to sacrifice interest to duty, so much patience and at times so much courage. The ambassador who fulfils the duties of his office never betrays fatigue, boredom nor disgust. He keeps to himself the emotions he experiences, the temptations to weakness that assail him. He has to remain silent regarding the bitter disappointments to which he is subjected, as well as the unexpected successes which chance sometimes, but rarely, bestows on him. While jealous of his own dignity, he is constantly mindful of others, is careful not to fall out with any one, never loses his serenity, and in great crises, when it is a question of peace or war, shows himself calm, unmoved and confident of success."