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## THE CELEBRITIES OF THE CORPS LEGISLATIF.

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### I.—ROUHER.

A GLANCE at the portrait of M. Rouher, the Imperial Minister of State, discovers a peculiarity not common in Frenchmen. His features are decidedly of an English type. Their form and expression have neither the sensitiveness nor the nervous excitability which we are accustomed to see in the faces of his countrymen; they possess rather the fixedness, calmness, and silent determination of the Englishman. You are even more struck with this when you see the man himself, as he sits erect and tranquil on the Ministerial bench at the Palais Bourbon. Other French statesmen are restless, impatient of opposition, and may often be observed, when they are being attacked by an opponent, in so excited a state that they can scarcely keep their places till he has finished. Amid all the fierce storms of the Chamber—and they are far more frequent than those of the House of Commons—Rouher alone seems unmoved, and appears to observe with a kind of cool and complacent contempt the efforts of his adversaries to arouse him. He has all that presence of mind, that quiet perseverance, that imperturbable self-control, which make up far more often an English than a French temperament. And Rouher, though, like an Englishman, slow to wrath—or at least slow to evince it—is great when he at last turns at bay. Proud, and perhaps stubborn, he, for a Frenchman, shows a wonderful patience and coolness of temper; but when he is once roused by an insufferable taunt

from Jules Favre, or an icily stinging thrust from Emile Ollivier, he throws himself into the contest with something of that muscular impetuosity which Fox displayed in his jousts with Pitt, and which, later on, made Brougham the terror of the opposite benches in the House of Commons. Thus, alike in feature, in manner, and in character of an English type, Rouher seems almost out of place in the midst of his vivacious and easily excited countrymen; and perhaps it has been owing, in some degree, to his more English qualities, that he has risen to his present high position.

It is interesting to sit in the dark little gallery of the Corps Legislatif, and note this singular contrast between the Minister of State and his colleagues. After you have been listening with admiration to the superb “roaring and blowing” of Favre, that refined and toned-down Mirabeau; after you have been well-nigh convinced by the incisive logic of the veteran Thiers; after you have been amused by the fiery vagaries of Pagés, the Nestor of the revolutionists; your attention is at once fixed by the tall and rigid form of the Emperor's most trusted counsellor, as he rises to reply. His air is one of confidence and command; the half contemptuous indifference of his countenance is also betrayed in his very manner of getting to his feet. He looks, every inch of him, the prosperous, self-complacent, haughty, well-backed official. Everything about him be-



ROUHER.





trays the bold minister of an absolute dynasty. Until recently, Rouher seemed to be in the lusty vigour of manhood ; but of late his health has become feeble, the cares of State have weighed heavily upon him, and have given him a much older and more weary look. Still his countenance is one of the most suggestive in the Chamber. He is taller than the middle height, well-built, and holds himself proudly erect. His head is a remarkably fine one, round, and well-shaped ; his soft, curly brown hair is thinning above the broad and well-curved forehead, over which a curl is permitted to fall. His dull gray eye is cold and almost listless,—but now and then flashes with indignation, or in exultant triumph. On one memorable occasion, years ago, the momentary brilliancy of his whole countenance is said to have attracted, for the first time, the attention of his colleagues in the Assembly, who had previously thought him but a dullish and hard-working official drudge. In 1850, during his first term of Minister of Justice, he was arguing, from the tribune, in favour of a law restricting the liberties of the press. He had been interrupted several times by the cries of that extreme party which had assumed the traditional title of the "Mountain"; at last, one of his sneers at the press was greeted by a perfect roar of indignation. Turning suddenly to the side where the "Mountain" party sat, and leaning over towards them, with outstretched arms and flashing eyes, Rouher shouted, "Your Revolution of February was but a *catastrophe !*" The Assembly was greatly excited by an apostrophe of such import, coming from a Minister of the President, and from one who had himself been a creature of the Revolution; the saying became historical ; and the men of that day, on hearing it, rightly predicted that it foreshadowed the establishment of a Second Empire.

But to return to Rouher, as he appears on the floor of the Corps Legislatif. A native of the genial climate of Auvergne, his complexion is smooth and sallow, and hardly ruffled by a single wrinkle ; his nose is gently aquiline and very handsome—of a pure aristocratic type ; his lips are full, yet firm-set, his chin round and somewhat prominent. As he begins to speak, his voice is low and monotonous, his gestures and manner stiff and formal. He seems to be, except on rare occasions, almost indifferent as to the effect he is about to produce, and to speak less with the object of persuading than of fulfilling an official duty. Little desirous, apparently, of popularity—for he seems to feel that his strength lies in the unbounded confidence of Napoleon—he certainly has failed to reap it, for no French statesman is less generally liked. As he continues to speak, the salient traits of his character more and more distinctly appear. Never off his guard—always possessing complete control over his temper—quick to answer by a short, curt repartee, a sarcastic interruption—resuming with ease the thread of his argument—bold in the assertion of fact—and subtle in getting over an awkward point, he strikes you as precisely the man to defend the policy and gloss over the errors of a personal government. Neither his career as a statesman nor his manner as an orator impresses one with his devotion to any one great principle ; he seems to be guided solely by expediency. He indulges little in the flowers of rhetoric, and proceeds directly with his subject. The close attention which the Chamber bestows upon his harangues must be attributed to another cause than any great fascination in his oratory. As the mouth-piece of the Emperor, he is an oracle. Upon his lips hang peace or war ; his every word may be—often is—a prophecy ; he seems to delight in

holding the Assembly in suspense, playing with their curiosity or their fears, and, after giving each one of his hearers a sort of mental St. Vitus's dance, in coming out suddenly with a short, bold, emphatic declaration. For, with all his English-like sang-froid, he has the Frenchman's love for the dramatic, and when he finds it necessary to be clear and definite, he loves to fashion the scene so that it shall have an *éclatant* denouement. Such an episode was that of last autumn, when the Pope was making up his mind to be a martyr to Garibaldian desecration, and was disappointed by the timely interference of the Chassepôt. Rouher had been making one of those crafty speeches which say much without enlightening anybody, and had sat down without exposing the intentions of the Government in reference to Rome. The crisis was a dangerous one; many of the Opposition—among them Thiers and Berryer—had declared for the Pope's sovereignty, and the choice of the Emperor must be given between the Ultramontanes and the Democrats. The excitement of the Chamber had reached its height; Berryer, Thiers, and the Imperialist Catholics surrounded the Minister, and besought him to declare which side the Government would take. The deputies watched the little group with unconcealed anxiety; the venerable Berryer gesticulated vehemently; Thiers was red with excitement, and talked rapidly; Rouher's features were immovable, and he stood with folded arms, looking down, apparently indifferent to the appeals made to him from every side. Finally, his face lit up as if with a sudden resolution; a slip of paper, containing a telegram from the Tuileries, was placed in his hand. With a quick step and his head held high in air, he mounted the steps, and appeared, for once flushed and nervous, at the rail of the tribune. The hall was as still

as if it were empty; the deputies on all sides leaned forward to catch every word; but there was no need of that, for the speaker's voice was this time clear and ringing. "Italy shall never possess Rome! NEVER!" declared the Minister; and as he descended, the Catholic deputies greeted him with a deafening ovation of applause.

Rouher seems to be quite wrapped up in the arduous duties of that office which has been wittily called, by a living French writer, the "Ministry of speech-making." Although obliged to appear often in society, he is by no means a brilliant society-man. He is affable in private, but talks little, and is always thoughtful and absent. As you see him in his superb carriage, rolling over the smooth asphalté pavement of the Rue de Rivoli, he seems to be in deep reverie; unmindful of what is passing around him; not conscious, or too proud to seem so, that all eyes are directed towards him. Yet he is not wanting in wit; at least, in that ironical humour which has its best field in a legislative assembly. On one occasion, during the Republic, when it was contrary to law to speak of the ancient noblesse by their former titles, Rouher alluded to M. de Broglie as the Duc de Broglie; and immediately, with a fine sense of irony, asked pardon of the Chamber for his infraction of the Constitution, and with mock gravity expressed the hope that his colleagues would not impeach him for it. But while at Paris he is the cold, haughty, energetic Minister, in the warm and lovely valleys of his native Auvergne he unbends, and becomes almost genial. It is a trait in singular contrast with the character which he exhibits in public life, that he cherishes an unusually strong affection for the province of his birth. There, and there only, is he popular; and there, and there only, he seems to forget the cares of public life, and to relax



the austerity of his bearing. The citizens of Riom, his native town, have named the street where he first saw the light, by his name; and the news of his coming is always welcomed with rejoicing and festivity. When the Emperor and Empress visited that part of France, not long after the *coup d'etat*, Rouher hastened on before them; and, on reaching Riom, was received by the Mayor, and presented with an address. He spoke to his compatriots in a tone so much more cordial than he had ever used at Paris, that it was everywhere remarked; and assured them that he had come to "join the ranks of his compatriots, rather as a private citizen, in welcoming their Majesties to his native province, than as a Minister attendant on the Sovereigns." One of the most creditable features of his public career has been his solicitude for the welfare of Auvergne. "I am never," he said on one occasion, addressing his fellow-citizens, "far away from you in heart. I always, with a pious and grateful care, bring hither all my joys and griefs, my family emotions, my political perplexities."

Rouher is a hard, driving worker. He is, perhaps, the best administrative officer in France. His *forte* is said to be finance, and it is owing to his ability in that department, combined with his ease and force as an orator, that he is sometimes called the "Gladstone of France." He is early at his office, by no means fashionably late, according to Parisian ideas, in his hour of getting to work; he is most careful in the preparation of his work, and especially of his speeches, which are revised again and again, and are especially replete with information on the subject which he treats. He is, as has been already said, the Emperor's most trusted counsellor, and seems to have quite superseded, in Napoleon's good graces, his former and more liberal favourites,

Count Walewski and the Duc de Persigny. Indeed, Rouher is believed to be even less liberal in his opinions than his chief, and to have been loth to grant those recent laws on the press and the right of public meetings, the good effects of which are already visible. His aristocratic tendencies may be traced back to the period of his youth. Before he was heard of as a politician, he was a small provincial advocate, with lofty ideas, great ambition, and good connections. Had not good old patriarchal King Louis Philippe luckily abolished the naval school of Angouleme, the haughty Minister of State might now have been serving as an obscure lieutenant on board an Imperial man-of-war, off the coast of Algeria, or in Oriental seas. In suppressing the academy, the Orleans monarch seems to have also suppressed Rouher's early propensity to a naval career. Back went the would-be midshipman to his Auvergne home; and he next tried the paternal and fraternal profession of drawing deeds and instructing advocates. He went up to Paris to complete his legal education; seems to have chafed terribly under its dreary and dusty monotony; yet plodded on, nursing in secret a restless, ambitious soul. His elder brother, impelled by ill-health, relinquished his practice to Eugene; and the latter, about the same time, made a fortunate matrimonial alliance with the daughter of M. Couchon, Mayor of Clermont, having admired and courted the future Madame Rouher during his course of studies there. Young Rouher's naturally conservative ideas, both social and political, were doubtless intensified by the attack which the *canaille* of Clermont made upon his father-in-law's house during the uprising of 1842; driving the respectable Mayor out at the back-door, and pillaging it from cellar to garret.

Law seems to have been fonder of

him than he of law ; for he achieved a rapid success at the bar, yet longed to relinquish it and enter upon a wider and more notorious career. In 1846 (being then in his thirty-second year) he had become so enterprizing a politician that he had won the countenance of Guizot, under whose auspices he stood for the Chamber of Deputies in his native town of Riom. The good folk, his neighbours, had not then learned his value ; and unceremoniously chose his antagonist. From that time till the great "catastrophe" of 1848, Rouher disappears from our view ; but soon after the tempestuous days of February have passed, and those most uncomfortable disciples of universal fraternity, the Provisional Government, have installed themselves at the Hôtel de Ville, he again emerges, now galvanized into an ardent republican, and is triumphantly elected deputy from Riom to the Constituent Assembly. In that unruly and pugnacious body, Rouher seems to have been frightened, for the while, out of his natural boldness. He found the task of achieving fame in revolutionary politics a far harder one than running after *greffiers*, haranguing in a provincial Palace of Justice, or having now and then a tilt with the Procureur-General. He sat long on the back-benches of the Assembly without making any sign ; spoke rarely, and did not shine as orator or as practical legislator ; and was, during several months a very common-place, demure, neglected young deputy. There was one of his colleagues, however, who had certain reasons for observing men at that period, and upon whom the infrequent speeches of young Rouher made an impression ; and while the latter was listened to with provoking indifference by the greater part of the Assembly, luckily for him, he was at that time heard with deep attention by the "coming man." Rouher owes

his eminence to the fact that with him, in the Constituent Assembly, sat the returned exile, now deputy for Paris, Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. His spirit, his perseverance, his patience, his evident dislike of the revolution, the care and ease with which he spoke, were all qualities likely to be needful to the Prince at a time not far distant. After the *coup d'état*, Rouher reaped the reward of long obscurity. He was at once summoned to the Emperor's council-board, and henceforth, with few interruptions, basked in the sunshine of the Imperial favour.

From this brief sketch of the Minister's not very striking career, it will be seen that he is emphatically what the French call a "new man." To his own qualities alone, and to the happy accident of his sitting as a deputy in the same assembly with the future Emperor, is to be attributed his success. He is thus a representative man of the Second Empire ; for that is essentially a *régime* of new men. The old Bourbon nobility hold aloof from it, because it is not Catholic enough, and because it is a constant refutation of the idea of "divine right" : it is amusing to hear these heirs of the ancient aristocracy sneer at Napoleon, and call him an "upstart" ; they fairly look down on him, with that icy though polite contempt which is the peculiar privilege of the blue-blooded descendant of the Bourbon noblesse ; and when you think how much the creature of an upstart should be despised, you may imagine with what feelings Rouher is regarded by these fine old Bourbon gentlemen. He is not less disliked by the Republicans, who see in him, as one of the most eloquent of them once said in the Chamber, "a recreant son of the Revolution." Billault, the predecessor of Rouher as Minister of State, was also an ungrateful child of the days of February ; but Billault had a *suaviter in modo*, a conciliatory



grace of manner, which Rouher lacks, and which went far to win for him the esteem of all parties, notwithstanding his desertion of the Republican cause. Rouher has staked his fortunes on the stability of the Imperial throne, and will sink or swim with it. He will do nothing to win the esteem or the support of his opponents. He repays contempt with contempt, and thrust with thrust. His vigour, and the promptness of his ironical wit—the latter rather the result of practice than a natural talent—enable him to hold his own with the ablest of his adversaries, and he apparently cares for no more amiable triumph. He does not hesitate to retort upon the opposition with their own weapons of invective and irony; he employs every little art which the greatest orators employ, and is an adept at that forensic fencing—that thrusting and parrying, slashing and throwing off guard—for which the Corps Legislatif is the most notable of arenas.

Rouher's public life has been marked by many changes in France. It would be unjust to him not to attribute to his administration many of those improvements and adornments which the Empire has received within the past ten years. Both Paris and the departments have visibly changed their aspect. The sumptuous metropolis has been decorated and made more spacious, and becomes every year more splendid than before. In the provinces, roads are being built, schools are multiplying, the condition of the towns is becoming more healthy, and all the benefits of a personal *régime* are appearing. The police system is a perfect machine in the effectiveness with which it works. The public offices are in a state of order and efficiency before unknown.

But perhaps the greatest triumph of Rouher's career was the Commercial Treaty with England. English in his personal appearance, and in many traits of his character, the Minister

of State is also a firm believer in many English ideas, and an earnest advocate of alliance and friendship between England and France. The reader may not have forgotten that he came to England on the occasion of the second Universal Exhibition of London. He was cordially received as a well-known friend of the alliance; and in answer to the address by which Earl Granville welcomed him, the Minister replied: "Every invoice which is signed to-day at Birmingham and Manchester, at Mulhouse and Rheims, is one more blow, aiding to destroy whatever germs of hate may yet exist between our two countries. Each one is another guarantee of that peace which is so necessary to the progress of these two peoples, and to the civilization of the world." It is hard for an Englishman to imagine how fierce was the opposition to free trade in France. To establish it was nothing less than to risk another revolution. Cobden's noble task, with a less courageous Minister, would have been hopeless. But Rouher saw both its commercial benefits to France, and its importance as another bond of amity between his own country and England. The Emperor, resembling Rouher in courage, in clear-sightedness, and in friendliness for England, took his Minister's advice: and Cobden was able to return successful in his mission. They bravely met the storm which burst upon them from every part of the Empire; and the result has proved that Napoleon III. could have had no more sagacious adviser than his Minister of State. One of the most successful and eloquent speeches Rouher ever delivered—one in which he showed more earnestness than in almost any other he ever pronounced—was that, last spring, in which he defended the Cobden Treaty, and triumphantly refuted the assertion that the distress of France during the winter was owing to that great measure.