

## Letter from Talleyrand to Louis XVIII

*Talleyrand was originally one of the handful of Catholic bishops who agreed to sign the Constitution of the Clergy so disastrously drafted by the National Assembly. He had subsequently worked for Napoleon and then, in the end, deserted him. Thus he was able to represent France at the Congress of Vienna. Here he sends a letter to King Louis XVIII explaining his success in negotiations.*

VIENNA, January 4, 1815.

Sire :

I have received the letter of the 23d of last month with which your Majesty deigned to honor me. On the 21st of the present month, the anniversary of a day of horror and eternal mourning, a solemn expiatory service will be celebrated in one of the principal churches of Vienna...Everything in this sad ceremony must be proportioned to the grandeur of its object, the splendor of the crown of France, and the quality of those who are to be present. All the members of the Congress will be invited, and I am sure that they will come...

The news of the signature of peace between England and the United States of America was announced to me on New Year's day by a note from Lord Castlereagh. I hastened to offer him my congratulations, and I also congratulated myself on the event, feeling that it may influence both the disposition of the minister and the resolution of those with whose pretensions we have had to contend hitherto. Lord Castlereagh showed me the treaty. It does not touch the honor of either of the two parties concerned and consequently it will satisfy both.

This happy intelligence was only the precursor of a still more fortunate event. The spirit of the coalition, and the coalition itself, had survived the Peace of Paris. My correspondence up to the present time has supplied your Majesty with repeated proofs of this. If the plans which, on arriving here, I found had been formed, had been carried into execution, France might have stood alone in Europe without being in good relations with any one single power for half a century to come. All my efforts were directed to the prevention of so great a misfortune, but my most ardent hopes did not reach the height of a complete success.

But now, sire, the coalition is dissolved, and forever. Not only does France no longer stand alone in Europe, but your Majesty is already in an alliance such as it seemed that fifty years of negotiation could not have procured for her. France is now in concert with two of the greatest powers and three states of the second order, and will soon be in concert with all the states which are guided by other than revolutionary principles and maxims. Your Majesty will be, in reality, the head and soul of that union, formed for the defense of the principles which your Majesty has been the first to proclaim.

So great and happy a change is only to be attributed to that special favor of Providence which was so clearly indicated by the restoration of your Majesty to the throne. Under God, the efficient causes

of this change have been:

My letters to Monsieur de Metternich and Lord Castlereagh and the impressions which they have produced;

The suggestions which I gave Lord Castlereagh relative to a union with France and of which I gave your Majesty an account in my last letter;

The pains I have taken to lull his distrust by exhibiting perfect disinterestedness in the name of France;

The peace with America, which, by releasing him from difficulty on that side, has left him more liberty of action and given him greater courage;

Lastly, the pretensions of Russia and Prussia, as set forth in the Russian project of which I have the honor to subjoin a copy; and especially the manner in which those pretensions were advanced and argued in a conference between their plenipotentiaries and those of Austria. The arrogant tone of that insolent and nonsensical document so deeply offended Lord Castlereagh that, departing from his habitual calmness, he declared that the Russians were claiming to lay down the law and that England was not disposed to accept that from anybody.